

## Message Text

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ACTION IO-14

INFO OCT-01 EA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01  
INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15  
ICA-11 HA-05 AID-05 EB-08 HEW-04 /100 W  
-----064481 152136Z /20

R 140850Z JUN 78  
FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9346  
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK  
AMCONSUL HONG KONG  
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK  
USMISSION GENEVA  
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENTIANE 0666

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: UN, LA  
SUBJECT: THE UN AND THE LPDR

SUMMARY: A GROUP OF UN PERSONNEL RECENTLY PARTICIPATED IN A  
LAO GOVERNMENT-SPONSORED DAY DIGGING IRRIGATION DITCHES.  
ALTHOUGH NOT ALL UN STAFFERS AGREE, THE UNDP RESREP  
APPARENTLY THINKS SUCH EFFORTS WILL STRENGTHEN THE UN  
PRESENCE IN LAOS. THE EMBASSY UNDERSTANDS THE RATIONALE,  
BUT WE ARE NOT SURE THAT THE BENEFITS WILL BE WORTH THE  
COST. END SUMMARY.

1. THE UNDP RESIDENT REPRESENTATIVE IN LAOS IS APPARENTLY  
MAKING AN ALL-OUT EFFORT TO IMPROVE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE  
LOCAL UN PRESENCE AND THE LAO GOVERNMENT.

2. ON SATURDAY, JUNE 10, A GROUP OF APPROXIMATELY 20 TO  
25 UN PERSONNEL AND THEIR SPOUSES SPENT THE DAY DIGGING  
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IRRIGATION DITCHES AT A SITE 45 KILOMETERS NORTH OF  
VIENTIANE ON THE LUANG PRABANG ROAD. ALL UN PERSONNEL  
IN LAOS AND THEIR FAMILIES HAD BEEN INVITED TO PARTICIPATE  
IN THE EVENT, WHICH HAD BEEN ARRANGED BY THE LAO MINISTRY  
OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS. NOT EVERYONE ACCEPTED; UNICEF AND  
UNHCR WERE NOT REPRESENTED, AND SOME OFFICES HAD ONLY  
PARTIAL TURNOUTS.

3. THE DITCH-DIGGING IS IN KEEPING WITH THE PRACTICE IN MOST LAO GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES. CIVIL SERVANTS ARE OFTEN ABSENT FROM THEIR DESKS FOR SEVERAL DAYS ON SUCH PROJECTS. (THIS IS IN ADDITION TO THE TIME SPENT IN POLITICAL SEMINARS.) THE UN EFFORT IS ALSO IN KEEPING WITH WHAT APPEARS TO BE AN EFFORT BY THE INCUMBENT UNDP RESREP TO ESCAPE THE FATE OF HIS PREDECESSOR, WHO WAS ASKED TO LEAVE LAOS. THE PREVIOUS RESREP'S ATTITUDE WAS REPORTEDLY THOUGHT BY THE LPDR TO BE INSUFFICIENTLY SUPPORTIVE TOWARD THE NEW REGIME.

4. THE REACTION AMONG UN PERSONNEL TO THE DITCH-DIGGING HAS BEEN MIXED. THE RESREP IS REPORTED TO HAVE ASKED RHETORICALLY, "WHO ELSE HAS BEEN ABLE TO SPEND THE ENTIRE DAY NEXT TO THE FOREIGN MINISTER?" OTHER LOWER-LEVEL STAFFERS HAVE BEEN ENTHUSIASTIC, MAINTAINING THAT THE DITCH-DIGGING WAS AN EXCELLENT WAY TO DEMONSTRATE THEIR COOPERATIVE SPIRIT, THEIR DESIRE TO HELP THE ORDINARY LAO PERSON, AND THEIR WILLINGNESS TO HELP BUILD A NEW LAOS.

5. SOME OF THOSE WHO REFUSED THE INVITATION HAVE MAINTAINED THAT THE DAY WAS SIMPLY A PUBLICITY STUNT (THOUGH IT HAS YET TO RECEIVE ANY PLAY IN THE LOCAL MEDIA). OTHERS HAVE SAID THAT THEY WERE SENT TO LAOS TO DO SPECIFIC

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TECHNICAL JOBS THAT THE LAO WERE NOT ABLE TO DO. IT WAS NEITHER AN APPROPRIATE OR USEFUL USE OF THEIR TIME AND TALENT TO DIG DITCHES. A MIDDLE GROUND APPEARS TO BE OCCUPIED BY THOSE WHO SAY THEY WOULD NEVER ENGAGE IN SUCH ACTIVITY BUT NEVERTHELESS CANNOT HELP FEELING A BIT GUILTY.

6. COMMENT: THE UN PRESENCE IN LAOS APPEARS TO FEEL THAT ITS POSITION HERE IS WEAK. IT IS TRUE THAT SEVERAL ADMINISTRATORS AND EXPERTS HAVE BEEN ASKED TO LEAVE SINCE THE LPDR CAME INTO OFFICE. THE CURRENT RESREP APPARENTLY BELIEVES THAT HE WILL NEVER BE ABLE TO ACCOMPLISH HIS MAIN GOAL OF PROMOTING LAO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT UNLESS HE IS ABLE TO PROVE HIS GOOD WILL AND CONSTRUCTIVE ATTITUDE TOWARD THE LPDR.

7. THE RISK IN THIS APPROACH IS THAT IN THE PROCESS, SOME TIME AND TALENT WILL BE WASTED, THE UN PRESENCE COULD BECOME EVEN MORE DIVIDED AGAINST ITSELF, SOME "FACE" MIGHT BE LOST BY THOSE WHO NEED THIS ELUSIVE COMMODITY TO DO THEIR JOBS, AND, MOST IMPORTANT, THE LAO MAY COME TO BELIEVE THAT THE UN ATTITUDE REPRESENTS AN

ENDORSEMENT OF MANY OF THE LPDR'S MOST ILL-CONCEIVED,  
DISFUNCTIONAL POLICIES.  
ROBERTS

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## Message Attributes

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**Channel Indicators:** n/a  
**Current Classification:** UNCLASSIFIED  
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**Decaption Date:** 01 jan 1960  
**Decaption Note:**  
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**Disposition Comment:** 25 YEAR REVIEW  
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